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ABSTRACT

Information is presented on the College Scholars Program in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The program permits outstanding students maximum freedom in designing their own curriculum. When accepted, the student is matched with a faculty member who is a scholar in an area or areas of interest to the student. Written proposals for programs of study are reviewed annually. The proposal includes a general discussion of present objectives and an appraisal of progress toward these goals. Course work usually involves honors versions or advanced segments of courses. Each program must include the design and accomplishment of research, schclarship, or creative imagination. (SW)

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No. 40 Spring, 1979

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Teaching-Learning Issues

THE COLLEGE SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Prepared by the Learning Research Center/The University of Tennessee

This number of *Teaching-Learning Issues* was prepared by Harry C. Jacobson, director of Special Programs in the College of Liberal Arts and associate professor of Physics and Astronomy. Quotations by Scholars are taken from interviews with Dr. F.A. Hilenski that appeared in *The Dean's Report,* Volume 2, November 2, Summer 1976, or from questionnaires returned by Scholar graduates in Spring 199. Valuable suggestions were contributed by Dr. James Dickson McLean, currently a member of the College Scholars Committee.

You can not teach a man anything;
you can only help him to find it
within himself.

Galileo

Learning Research Center
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

". . . a fantastic program . . ." ". . . a flexible and stimulating program . . ." ". . . very valuable . . ." ". . . had a great deal to do with making my years at UT among the most rewarding and challenging of my life." "I think I have gotten as much out of my education here as I could have anywhere. The Program has allowed me the freedom to do this."

The students quoted above are expressing their enthusiasm for the College Scholars Program in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Faculty and administrators who are involved with the Program are equally enthusiastic about it, and we are pleased to have this opportunity to share with colleagues and with friends of the University some information about this remarkable Program. We hope that faculty, students, and administrators on this campus who wish to participate in the Program or who wish to explore the possibility of establishing similar programs in other colleges will inquire further. Also, we feel that the Program will be of interest to high school students, faculty, and counselors, as well as to admissions officers for graduate and professional schools. Finally, we would like to share our experience with colleagues on other campuses who receive *Teaching-Learning Issues* on a regular basis.

ORIGINS

In 1970, Dean Alvin H. Nielson appointed an ad hoc committee to conduct a thorough review of the entire curriculum in Liberal Arts. The amended committee report was approved by the faculty, trustees, and Tennessee Higher Education Commission in 1972. Central to the renewed curriculum was the Basic Program intended to accommodate the objectives of most of our 6500 liberal arts students. The Basic Program includes a Triad of general education requirements, a major, and a significant range of electives. Major options include the customary programs, ranging from anthropology to zoology; a variety of cultural studies programs, such as American studies, linguistics, and so on; and a program in human services. The new curriculum also provides for an Individualized Program in which students with particular strengths or special interests are encouraged in propose their own major, drawing upon all the re-

4 JUN 1 3 1980

sources of the College and of the University. A third option for the Bachelor of Arts degree is provided for students who plan to study in the University's Center for the Health Sciences in Memphis. Also, the Curriculum retained professional programs leading to the degrees of Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Music, and Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. The fourth option for a B.A. degree was called the College Scholars Program. The committee report included the following language.

> College Scholars Program. As an alternative for a relatively small, select group of outstanding students, the College Scholars Program would permit the individual maximum freedom in designing his own curriculum. At the present time we offer the superior student only random opportunities to exploit special abilities, interests, and motivations; we do not have a total program for him (unless he happens to major in one of the few departments with honors major programs). The College Scholars Program would attempt to rectify this omission in the College's offerings and would provide incentive to honors-level students to exert themselves to the maximum intellectually.

Throughout the review and after adoption of the new curriculum, Dean Nielsen was a strong advocate of the Scholars Program. His support was manifested by the administrative structure which he established, with the Program Director operating from the Dean's Office; by the financial support provided—including a budget for program activities and research; and by the obvious enthusiasm with which he described the Program to others. On the occasion of his retirement as Dean, the honors bestowed upon him included the establishment of an endowment by friends and supporters of excellence in education. Interest from this endowment is awarded annually—in the form of the Alvin H. Nielsen College Scholars' Scholarship—to the outstanding junior or senior in the Program. The Program continues to enjoy the full support of the Dean, the department heads, and the faculty.

A committee of faculty and students worked out a set of guidelines for the Program, and these were approved in the spring of 1973. In early discussions, the students felt a need to prove themselves, and many wished to include tests and formally stated requirements. In retrospect, the guidelines which resulted from these discussions reflect temerity, timidity, and some anxiety. The Program was to set the pace as the College and University moved to a position of social and educational leadership; at the same time, we wanted a fail-safe Program, so that students would not suffer by exposing themselves to ambiguity and the challenge of excellence.

The thought was, and is, that the Program should be large enough to accommodate those who can profit from it and small enough so that no one suffers from the lack of structure; thus, there is no quota. Thirteen students were accepted to begin work during the fall of 1973, and at present there are eighty-three students participating.

PURPOSES

One of the most important features of the Program is the fact that a continuing discussion of educational goals is necessary. This, in turn, re-

quires that personal value structures be examined. The goals of the Scholars Program are the goals of liberal education, and, while these goals are often listed, all the lists have common elements.

First, we hope that Scholars will formulate some personal objectives in life, whether it be to serve the people, to maximize profits, to be a man or woman for others, etc.

We expect that our Scholars will be effective in oral and written communication;
that they will:
be able to understand and to pose questions and to tell good ones from bad ones;
be able to analyze complex problems;
be literate and perhaps fluent in mathematics, logic, computer science, statistics, and foreign language;
be prepared for self-directed education;
increase their capacities for enjoying life through literature, music, art, and sport;
come to know their abilities, their limitations and their genuine interests—in short, their potential;
explore alternatives for leading a life of significance;
advert to their own value system and to those implicit systems which give shape to the University climate;
have a delightful four years;
and, finally, we expect that they will know something.

The *General Catalog* indicates that the College has set these or similar goals for all the students in the College, as well as for those whom we contact only through general education. The difference is that we ask Scholars to achieve a special level of excellence. (Certainly we do not expect that all Scholars will reach the same level of excellence in all areas.)

There is always an uneasy silence when a cause and effect relationship is even implied for anything other than the transfer of information. As Harold Taylor has remarked:

> We come here to another of the submerged facts in American higher education. The person who seeks an education . . . must involve himself in discovering the meaning of his own life and the relation between who he is and what he might become. Without that vision of a personal future and a hard look at the reality of one's own situation, the ultimate purpose of education itself—that is, to grow, to change, to liberate oneself—is almost impossible to achieve.

Or, said differently, "'Cheshire-Puss,' Alice began, 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?' 'That depends on where you want to get to,' said the Cat."

Comments from Scholars tend to support the notion that the Program does in fact increase self-awareness, build confidence, provide an opportunity to acquire information, enhance the ability for self-directed learning, and aid in the development of valid methods of inquiry:

"Graduating as a College Scholar had made me expect a lot out of myself professionally, so that I find myself restless with a cut-and-dried technical, full-time job. I want to do something much more exciting and interesting with my life. It has made me more aware of my potential." *Roxanne Trapp, artist/illustrator for an engineering firm, free lance scientific illustrator.*

"It has encouraged me to believe in myself and my abilities." *Linda Rader, entering the MBA program at the University of Chicago, fall 1979.*

". . . . except for family orientation, I would not have listed any of the same goals or plans four year ago. . . . the biggest effect has been in my feelings about education, what it should do, where priorities should be placed, and my role in the process." *Mary Davis, graduate fellow in physiology at Vanderbilt University.*

"I couldn't get a better education anywhere—and that, frankly, surprised me." *Ellen Carson, presently a third year student at Harvard Law School.*

SCHOLARS

Students can be accepted at any time between their senior year in high school and the end of their sophomore year in college. Applicants provide records of previous academic achievement and test scores (ACT). They ask two or more persons to send letters of reference to the Special Programs Office, commenting upon their abilities, self-motivation, signs of creativity, and so on. The application requires the writing of several brief essays. When the application is complete, an interview is arranged between the student and a three-member committee consisting of two faculty members and one Scholar. (Some interviews are conducted individually.) Admission is provisional for two quarters, during which students are expected to maintain a 3.25 cumulative average and to show signs of continued interest. A full review of accomplishments and projections is undertaken at the end of the junior year.

The students accepted ordinarily have demonstrated sustained academic achievement and aptitude as expressed through test scores. For example, eight Scholars graduated in Spring Quarter, 1976. Their ACT composite score was 30, and their high school grade average was 3.70, the UTK average was 3.75 and six graduated with highest honors. Twelve Scholars will graduate Spring Quarter, 1979, with a UTK average of about 3.80. But the students who applied and were not accepted had a high school grade point average of 3.62 and an ACT composite of 29+. Many times a student's record, references, etc., are excellent, but the interview committee feels that the student's objectives will be best served by the Basic Program. This usually occurs if the student has a relatively narrow range of interests, which have been validated in some fashion and which correspond to a strong existing program. The committees are also reluctant to accept students who want to avoid requirements, who view the opportunity as a scalp, or who seem to need substantial direction.

"A College Scholar must have a serious interest. It doesn't have to be a specific interest—when I applied I didn't have a specific goal in mind. But you have to have a very serious interest in whatever occupies your mind—to be seriously fascinated with your own educational process.

"The Program is not at all the place for someone who needs to be directed all the time. What the Program does, in fact, is take away all the direction built into the normal curriculum and place it on you. If you're indecisive, you're sunk. But if you like to get heavily into something, then the Program is heaven-sent." *Eric Lewald, independent film maker.*

"The ideal College Scholar has to be primarily an independent person—self-reliant, confident. The Program really benefits the kind of person who will stay up all night, not because he has a test in the morning, but because he is really into something. There are not many people around like that, but the few that are ought to be here, in this Program." *Chris Dorian, third year student at Yale Law School.*

"The kind of person who would be happy in the Program is a person who values education and who is innovative in the way he seeks knowledge and who is imaginative in the way he uses what he knows. Someone who is mature and responsible would be happy in the Program." *Judy Cornett, entering The University of Tennessee Law School, fall 1979.*

TUTORS

When accepted, the student is matched with a faculty member (Tutor) who is a scholar in an area or areas of interest to the student. This aspect of the program plays a central role in the development of distinguished programs of study. Prospective Tutors are recommended by the interviewing committee, Scholars, faculty, and administrators. The criteria employed are: a general concern for students and undergraduate education; the ability to interact with a particular Scholar as advisor and friend; expert knowledge and rigorous scholarly activity in areas that parallel the interests of the Scholar; and the potential strength that the Tutor will bring to the Program. The understanding always exists that a change can be made if the interaction is not fruitful from the perspective of either the Tutor or the Scholar. The Scholar is responsible for developing a complete program of study in collaboration with the Tutor. "Program," here, is intended to include all dimensions of the undergraduate experience. The Tutor, in turn, attempts to put the Scholar in contact with the right opportunity and person at the right time.

Contrary to much of what is written and said, educational work is challenging and requires superior talent. The Tutors who have participated, generally without compensation, represent superior talent and indicate the centrality of the program in the College. Scholars is not a Program that is simply tolerated. For example, in the 1976-77 academic year the Tutors included two deans, four assistant or associate deans, six department heads, and twelve recipients of the outstanding teacher award.

"I got encouragement and new ideas from a number of people I wouldn't have met without the Program. I've had particularly good relations with my tutor. Stan makes me think. Sometimes I don't want to go, because he makes me think so hard." *Ruth Garwood, administrative assistant for the Louisville Ballet.*

"It takes more discipline to do this Program than a regular course of study, even though there are no requirements. It leaves the responsibility of getting a quality education up to you.

"The ideal of the College Scholars Program has held up remarkably well. Most important are the Scholar-Tutor relationships and the camaraderie among the Scholars." *Nancy Ann Min, first year student at Harvard Law School, Rhodes Scholar 1979-81.*

PROGRAMS

Written proposals for programs of study are reviewed annually by Tutors, by the Director, and, where appropriate, by the Scholar's committee. The proposal includes a general discussion of present objectives, both short and long term, and an appraisal of progress toward these goals (and toward the goals of liberal education). It also includes completed and projected course work, a discussion of research plans, and a summary of extracurricular activities undertaken since the last proposal. Some students use a portfolio approach to these questions. (Here is what I can do, and this is how I can document my ability to do it; and here is an ability I seek, and this is how I might set about acquiring it.)

Scholars are urged to develop breadth as well as a concentration. To challege themselves, course work usually involves honors versions or advanced segments of courses. The honors courses that are recommended are of two types. The first, offered by the departments, parallels regular courses. The second, University honors, tends to be interdisciplinary in character, is offered for small groups (fifteen or fewer), is usually in a seminar format, and is organized by the Director of Special Programs. In both cases the best teachers are used and the work is part of the regular load, not an overload. All of these opportunities available to Scholars are, of course, available to other students in the University.

Frequently, skills and habits can be developed through extracurricular activities. Graduates include two student government presidents; chairpersons of, for example, the Issues, Cultural Attractions, Videotape, and Film committees and the Dean's Student Advisory Council; swimmers, runners, fencers, and more. Independent, off-campus, and foreign study is encouraged. Scholars have spent significant amounts of time studying abroad in England, Wales, France, Germany, Austria, Brazil, Japan, and Russia.

PROJECTS

Each Program must include the design and accomplishment of a substantial piece of research, scholarship, or creative imagination. The objective of the project is to expose the student to the process of inquiry over an extended period of time (ordinarily at least one year) under the direc-

tion of an expert in the field. The work should ordinarily not be a master's thesis, but must be much more than a term paper. Some projects lead to publication, but most do not. Sometimes the project is supervised by the Tutor, but frequently the project is directed by one or more research advisers. Each Scholar ordinarily makes two presentations, one proposing and describing the work to be undertaken as a project and the other presenting and defending the finished work. These presentations are open to all members of the University community.

Projects are carefully evaluated, usually by a committee of at least three faculty members or professional in the field. The Scholars themselves are evaluated by committees which award fellowships and scholarships, by various graduate and professional programs, and by employers.

"The senior project is a good thing. Everybody who is happy in the Program wants to do it. Because the senior project is your major graduation requirement rather than X-number of courses, you really go in-depth into something. If you do a good job it might lead to a professional head start." *Rusty Parks, graduate student in physics at Johns Hopkins University.*

Ron Luethke worked for three years with Dr. Alex Shivers, professor of zoology. Shiver's research team has received international attention for the development of a birth control device. Luethke, who contributed to this effort, feels that the opportunities in Scholars affected his acceptance in a joint Ph.D.-M.D. program at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine where he is now studying.

"I'm sure it was the reason. I had an opportunity to gain good experience in basic laboratory research and to demonstrate my professional research potential," he said.

Betsy Cochran studied a model of nerve impulse transmission with Dr. Brian Sleeman, who has since returned to the University of Dundee, and Dr. Tom Hallman of the Mathematics Department. The results on the stability of solutions and speed of propagation will be submitted for publication.

Suzette Adler Smith, who is currently studying at the University of Moscow, explored "Alexander Herzen and the Russian Free Press in Exile." Her paper included original translations of some of Herzen's work.

Two novels, a film, and an exhibit of ceramics, lithographs, and paper have been submitted to satisfy the requirement. Michael Dagley, who has received a fellowship to study philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, completed a psychological/philosophical novel entitled *Private Matter.* Mark Edens, who will be a Hilton Smith Fellow in History here next year, has completed an historical novel, *Herds Stand Weeping.* The film by John Loy and Glenn Morgan was a recruiting film for technical personnel that is currently being used by the company that employed them to produce it. Both have gone on in filmmaking and film studies. Anne Leader's work has been informed by a desire to understand the effects of color and texture. She plans to continue work toward a B.F.A. at UTK.

"(My Tutor) knows my capabilities and makes me work toward them. He's about as tired of this senior project as I am. But I think the idea of a senior thesis or project is a good one. It's tough; everybody's burnt out at the end, but it is the single most important attribute of the Program." *Chris Dorian.*

ACTIVITIES

A characteristic of the Program from the outset has been a resistance of enduring structure. Many of the very important events of Scholars are serendipitous ones. However, since 1973 a variety of activities and opportunities have been offered in an effort to foster interaction and to provide means for working toward the goals expressed earlier. For example, a *College Scholars' Newsletter* is distributed three times per quarter. The purpose is to inform participants of program events, student and faculty activities, and opportunities not widely advertised. Features include interviews and bibliographies which permit a person to explore a discipline without committing class time. A Scholar/Tutor Interest Profile is distributed annually. There are two weekly luncheons, one brown bag and one in a private dining room with food available from the University Food Services. Quarterly there is a principal social event such as a picnic or an off-campus retreat to focus on concerns of the program (and to have a social occasion). There have been group gatherings in faculty homes to discuss research opportunities for undergraduates in the life sciences, in the physical sciences, and in the humanities and social sciences.

The notion that Scholars and Tutors constitute a small college within, and with the resources of, a large University persists as an ideal. In the sense that this community views itself as younger and older scholars vitally committed to excellence, the characterization is correct. Almost without exception, the students reflect a sense of responsibility and concern for the Program. This focus on excellence, per se, is not the usual situation for a small, high quality liberal arts college. Moreover, the awesome set of curricular and extracurricular attractions in a university hinder a commitment to participate in all Scholar activities.

Opportunities for a common residence, lounge, etc. have been explored, but these ideas have been resisted, primarily because of the diversity of interests. Apparently this reflects a desire to focus on cognitive issues rather than a desire to develop in a social, affective, student-governed direction. Modest perquisites are available. Certificates of participation, carrells, graduate student library privileges, and funds to complement departmental support of research are available.

QUESTIONS

How closely do the outcomes of the Program agree with the objectives? And, if the outcomes do agree with the objectives, how can the outcomes be evaluated in individual cases? And, if the Program is successful and the success can be demonstrated, can the success of the Program be used in some fashion to alter a political climate in which parents and students ask that we certify mediocrity? The public does not insist on quality toys or excellent ice cream. Why should we expect a clamor for first-rate edu-

cation? Why should we expect that programs would be funded, or at least judged, in terms of what they accomplish rather than in terms of how costly they are to maintain?

Joseph Epstein said, ". . . over the past two decades, intellectual seriousness appears to have been the only reform not attempted in undergraduate education."

At the end of Spring Quarter, 1979, sixty students will have graduated as Scholars. A recent survey of graduates yielded comments of the following sort:

". . . people tend to expect more from you because you expect it of yourself." ". . . the reward of participation in the Program should be internal, the result of a unique—dare I say constant?—interaction with other members of an intellectual community."

". . . being able to meet and become friends with so many interesting people was the most valuable aspect of being a scholar. I find I cannot adequately express what it means to have known Richard Marius, Sarah Blanshei, Paul Huray, Allen Carroll . . . and so many others."

Graduates of the program are successful in virtually all senses of the word—including the materialistic—and all who are involved in the Program are enriched by it. Can the benefits of the program be extended to the larger University community? Can the benefits of the Program be expressed in a manner which will elicit the public support which would be required to extend the benefits in question?